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ABSTRACT

The report provides an overview of the findings, analysis, and conclusions of the external evaluation of the effectiveness of Alberta Education Library Services conducted between September 1985 and March 1986 under the guidance of the Library Services Evaluation Steering Committee (Phase 2 of the evaluation and planning process initiated in 1985 to clarify the future role and direction of the library services). The purpose of the study was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the library services program and to provide guidance to the interdivisional steering committee regarding key delivery and service issues to be considered in developing the long-term plan for library services (Phase 3). The study methodology, study findings, a special library model, evaluation of library services, conclusions of the study, and guidelines for Phase 3 are briefly summarized. (KM)

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An Evaluation of Alberta Education's Library Services

Summary Report

Deloitte Haskins & Sells Associates

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Alberta Education

Alberta EDUCATION

AN EVALUATION OF
ALBERTA EDUCATION'S LIBRARY SERVICES

SUMMARY REPORT

Deloitte
Haskins+Sells Associates

Under Contract to Alberta Education

Edmonton, Alberta

April 1986

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We would like to thank all those who contributed to the completion of this study. First of all, we are indebted to the members of the Library Services Evaluation Committee for their guidance and support throughout the project:

Chairman: Dr. Nelly McEwen, Planning Services
Members: Martin Adamson, Media and Technology
Blanche Friderichsen, Edmonton Regional Office
Dave Laing, Computer Systems and Data Base Management
Dr. John Myroon, Learning Resources Distributing Centre
Gerry Wilson, Calgary Regional Office
Shirley Wolodko, Financial and Administrative Services

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Finally, we would like to acknowledge the contribution of Alberta Education officials, managers, professionals and library staff members who participated in the survey and interviews.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify the issues, problems, opportunities and priorities which should be considered in developing a long-range library services plan for the department.

The methodology consisted of: a survey of all professional and managerial staff (n = 429); interviews with five senior department officials, 12 library staff members, and a sample (n = 48) of departmental managers and professionals; on-site observations of library operations; a review of library financial information and operating statistics; a review of the literature on special library practices and trends; and interviews with librarians from four external education libraries and three exemplary special libraries. The analysis of findings in each area focused on answering key questions about the library services **program**, its **delivery** and potential **new services.**

The results indicated that staff use the libraries relatively frequently for job-related information, filling both **research** and **professional development** requirements. Users of the central library were generally more satisfied than users of decentralized libraries where components were more inconsistently implemented. Organizational objectives for efficient utilization of resources were not being fully optimized, and a number of problems were identified with regard to the organization and delivery of library services. A variety of gaps and new service areas were also identified.

The cause of weakness in the library services program was considered to be largely **structural** in nature, relating mainly to the absence of a formal mandate and policy framework for implementing library services. Six major recommendations were made with respect to: the development of a **mission** for library services; certain areas requiring **policy development**; the development of **program and delivery standards** and appropriate **monitoring systems**; the establishment of a **planning and evaluation cycle** for library services; the need for enhanced **departmental integration** regarding information services; and the **program delivery options** to consider in developing the long-range plan for library services.

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INTRODUCTION

Alberta Education delivers a range of library services to its professional and managerial personnel through a network of libraries, consisting of the central library in the Devonian Building (Edmonton), and decentralized libraries in the five regional offices (Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge and Red Deer) and the two provincially administered schools (Alberta Correspondence School and Alberta School for the Deaf).

In 1985, the department initiated an evaluation and planning process intended to clarify the future role and direction of its library services. The first step in the planning process was to conduct an **evaluability assessment** to determine the extent to which the library services program structure was amenable to evaluation, and to provide the methodology for conducting the evaluation.

The evaluability assessment (Phase One) was completed in June of 1985, and presented a profile and description of library services, the evaluation issues, the options for evaluating the program, and the prescribed approach for subsequent phases of the study.

- **Phase Two** - An external effectiveness evaluation to determine the manner and extent to which the library services program achieves its goals and produces effects.

- **Phase Three** - The development of a long-range plan (3 to 5 years) for library services.

This report presents the findings, analysis and conclusions of the external effectiveness evaluation (Phase Two) conducted between September 1985 and March 1986 under the guidance of the Library Services Evaluation Steering Committee. The purpose of the study was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the library services program and to provide guidance to the interdivisional Steering Committee regarding key program and service delivery issues to be considered in developing the long-term plan for library services (Phase Three).

STUDY METHODOLOGY

The approach to conducting the study was prescribed in the evaluability assessment which identified the following key areas of evaluation.

- **Program** - the extent to which the library components meet the needs of the department.

- **Delivery** - the efficiency and effectiveness with which the program is being implemented.

- **New Services** - the need for and benefits of potential new services.

Information for the evaluation was derived from both external and internal sources.

External Sources

- **Literature Review** - current practices and trends in special libraries;
- **Interviews** - with librarians from three provincial education libraries (Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario), three exemplary special libraries (Amoco, Booz-Allen & Hamilton, Home Oil) and the University of Alberta education library.

Internal Sources

- **Survey** - of 429 professional and managerial staff in the department (340 survey returns);
- **Interviews** - with the five education officials, 12 library staff members, and a sample (48) of departmental managers and professionals;
- **On-site Observations** - of the eight departmental libraries;
- **Documentation Review** - library financial information and operating statistics.

STUDY FINDINGS

The findings from each source of information are summarized below.

Current Practices and Trends in Special Libraries

The literature review and interviews with external special librarians suggest that, in many organizations, special libraries play an important role in the delivery of information services, and are increasingly evolving towards **value added** services where retrieved information is further packaged by the library for the end user (e.g., scanning and monitoring of journals, summarizing of retrieved information). Special libraries may be large or small, and may be centralized or decentralized depending on the needs of the organization, although decentralized libraries are normally self-sufficient in end-user services.

Special libraries are usually staffed by full-time **professional librarians** assisted as required by clerical support staff. The better special libraries tend to report to senior management and enjoy a relatively **high profile** in their respective organizations.

Users of special libraries include both **researchers** who require project-specific information, as well as **managers** who require ongoing professional information to stay current in their field. Services are sometimes provided to outside users, although the priority is generally lower.

Typical special library components include:

- a relatively small **collection** of books, journals and reference materials optimized to support urgent or frequent information requests;
- a **catalogue** of the local library collection;
- online access to extensive **databases** of information;
- heavy emphasis on **network/interlibrary loan** activity to procure materials not available in the local collection.

STUDY FINDINGS

Current Practices and Trends in Special Libraries (continued)

Typical special library services include:

- a highly specialized **reference** service supported by computerized database searches;
- a highly proactive **current awareness** service to keep clients up-to-date in their respective areas;
- marketing and promotion to foster increased library utilization;
- **technical services**, including acquisitions, cataloguing, circulation, etc.

With regard to automation, special libraries have tended to be at the **leading edge** in their use of information technology, although many have implemented automated systems in a somewhat **ad hoc** fashion.

Recent trends in special libraries include:

- use of management and goal-directed **operating statistics** to provide ongoing evaluative information;
- provision of highly tailored **executive information services**;
- direct **secondment** of library staff to research projects;
- participation in corporate **records management**;
- participation in corporate **information systems** design and implementation;
- information delivery via **electronic mail** and **facsimile**;
- use of **CD-ROM** (digital disks) for in-house databases.

Advancements in information technology are dramatically enhancing the capabilities of special libraries to meet the needs of their users.

STUDY FINDINGS

Survey Findings

The completed questionnaires were analyzed by the location and function of the respondents to identify significant patterns. The findings may be summarized as follows.

Information Needs

Professional and curricular information sources are most frequently used, with print sources (books, journals, etc.) being the most prevalent. Information is important for both research activities and for keeping staff up-to-date in their professional areas.

Sources of Information

Staff most frequently derive information from sources close at hand (e.g., personal contacts, branch resources, personal books, etc.), with formal library sources used somewhat less frequently. Alberta Education's libraries, however, are used more frequently than external libraries, and generally more frequently than other departmental information units.

User Assessment of Departmental Libraries

Staff awareness of the major library resources and services is generally high. The professional collection and reference service were generally found to be most important, although decentralized users also focus on curricular resources. Decentralized staff appear to use their libraries somewhat more frequently and derive greater utility on average than central staff, although significant pockets of high central use were noted. User satisfaction is quite high centrally, but noticeably lower in the decentralized libraries except for the Calgary Regional Office

STUDY FINDINGS

Survey Findings (continued)

and the Alberta Correspondence School. The major benefits of library use relate to quick access to quality information.

New Services

Many users noted gaps in existing library capabilities, particularly in staffing, resources and services. Users seem most interested in enhanced **value added** services (e.g., scanning of publications, screening/summarizing of information), as well as indirect access to the holdings of external libraries. Most users feel the libraries should serve the department, although decentralized users also consider it important to serve the school systems.

The survey results indicate weakness in the holdings and services in many of the decentralized libraries, although users in most cases indicate moderate satisfaction with their libraries.

User Interview Findings

Library users were interviewed to determine their information needs and satisfaction with the libraries. The results may be summarized as follows.

Central Office Staff

Information needs vary widely across central office staff, with the Program Development and the Planning and Evaluation Divisions most in need of information available through the library. Library utilization and satisfaction are quite high, with most users indicating a desire for highly personalized, proactive, value added reference and current awareness services.

STUDY FINDINGS

User Interview Findings (continued)

Regional Office Staff

The change in role for consultants has shifted needs somewhat from curricular to professional information. Consultants and some directors are relatively frequent users of their libraries, although satisfaction levels vary by location. Most users prefer the current decentralized delivery system, and many feel services should also be made available to users outside the department.

Provincial School Staff

The provincial schools have unique needs for both curricular and professional information. The libraries are used frequently, although satisfaction with the Alberta Correspondence School library is higher than with the Alberta School for the Deaf library. Users feel the school libraries should concentrate on collections and related reference services, with the central library providing in-depth database and interpretive reference services.

Education Officials

The officials feel the libraries should focus on departmental needs, and should avoid implementing services or capabilities before the demand and benefits have been demonstrated. They also feel that the current decentralized approach to service delivery is appropriate, but that more senior level planning input is required to guide service delivery.

Library Operation Findings

The results of interviews with librarians and the review of library documentation are summarized.

STUDY FINDINGS

Library Operation Findings (continued)

Librarian Interviews

The decentralized library staff frequently lack the skills and the time needed to provide the level of service to which central library users are accustomed. Many feel uncertain about the respective roles of the central and decentralized libraries and the degree of decentralization that is appropriate. The level of managerial commitment to library services is considered low, particularly in the decentralized locations where library staff do not have a high profile and sense a lack of training and career development opportunities. Library inservice training available from the central library has not had a high priority in the decentralized branches.

On-site Observations

There is considerable inconsistency across the libraries in the implementation of various components and services, with many decentralized libraries lacking the basic resource and service capabilities demonstrated by the central library (e.g., collections, databases, reference, current awareness, etc.). Certain of the decentralized libraries do not use the central library extensively to fill in local gaps.

Documentation Review

Departmental financial information indicates that 2% of expenditures go toward library services. The central library accounts for 67% of this total, due in part to a significant service work load for the decentralized libraries (i.e., acquisitions, cataloguing, photocopying, reference, interlibrary loan, database searches). Branches also acquire

STUDY FINDINGS

Library Operation Findings (continued)

materials, most of which are purchased for field testing purposes and are not considered part of formal library collections.

The central library collection is used to fill approximately 90% of quick-reference questions, while 86% of in-depth reference questions are referred to outside libraries (e.g., University of Alberta, national/international libraries), indicating appropriate collection maintenance practices and healthy network activity in the central library.

A SPECIAL LIBRARY MODEL

The evaluation of library services requires an understanding of the **rationale** for implementing a special library program. The decision to establish and maintain a special library is predicated on the need to provide employees with information in order for them to perform their jobs more effectively. The key economic issue in library services is the trade-off between the implicit **value of timely information** to the users (maximized by decentralizing information resources) and the explicit **costs of providing this information** (minimized by centralizing costly human and material resources).

In order to develop the appropriate level of resources, it is critical to understand users' job functions and information needs. Employees access a wide variety of information sources, and tend to use **sources at hand** (e.g., own books, telephone, files, etc.) more frequently than **remote sources.** The special library is only one of many complementary suppliers of information services.

The library **collection** normally serves routine requests for factual or professional information, while non-routine information is obtained by accessing the library **network**, frequently using databases to locate the required information which is then retrieved through interlibrary loan. The **catalogue** is in place so that users may be aware of library resources, thereby increasing utilization and decreasing duplication. Of all components, however, the heart of the special library is its **reference** service, the quality of which is influenced by the skills of library staff and the quality of the other library components.

A special library, if it is operating effectively, will meet users' needs for the quality, quantity and timeliness of information, as well as the organization's overall expectations for efficiency of operation and utilization of resources. In a decentralized environment, the network of libraries requires particular attention to ensure consistent delivery of services to all users, and to foster the cooperation among libraries necessary for efficient utilization of resources.

EVALUATION OF LIBRARY SERVICES

The evaluability assessment called for the evaluation of the library services program in three major areas: program, delivery and new services.

Program

With regard to the library program, the key evaluation issues relate to meeting users' needs for information and satisfying organizational objectives for efficient utilization of resources.

Meeting Users' Needs

The findings indicate that decentralized staff use their libraries **more frequently** and **more exclusively** than do centralized staff, and that they also place a higher priority on maintaining library resources and services, indicating a higher overall dependency on the library as a source of information. The central office location comprises a more diverse professional population, including both users and non-users of the library, although significant groups of high central library use were noted (e.g., consultants, research officers, resource officers).

The use of various library components varies across central divisions and the decentralized offices, although the **professional collection** and the **reference service** are generally in strong demand. Decentralized users also demonstrate a need for **curricular resources.** The interviews and survey of professional staff indicate generally good satisfaction levels, although various complaints with staffing and resources were made. Except for the Calgary Regional Office and the Alberta Correspondence School, the decentralized staff are clearly less satisfied than users of the central library. Differences in satisfaction levels can be attributed to:

EVALUATION OF LIBRARY SERVICES

Program (continued)

- deficiencies in certain collections, with varying expenditure levels and allocations (e.g., books, periodicals, etc.) and a lack of policies regarding collection development and service to external users;
- incomplete cataloguing and underutilization of catalogue products;
- deficiencies in the functioning of the internal library network due to inadequate staff training and supervision;
- deficiencies in the reference service due to staffing and collection weaknesses.

These problems are most pronounced in the decentralized locations where library decisions are made in an ad hoc fashion according to local program priorities. The result is that staff across the department do not have equal access to the information required to perform their duties.

Meeting Organizational Objectives

On the whole, the departmental libraries are striving towards efficient utilization of resources; however, the objectives for library services are not being fully achieved. Specific problems include:

- **Inadequate Sharing and Risk of Duplication** - Some purchases of branch periodicals are bypassing the centralized acquisition system, with the attendant risk of unnecessary duplication. Not all departmental materials have been catalogued, resulting in lost opportunities to share these resources. The absence of policies governing collection development and maintenance may also lead to unnecessary duplication, particularly with the low reliance on the internal network for sharing resources.

EVALUATION OF LIBRARY SERVICES

Program (continued)

- **Underutilization of Resources** - Weaker decentralized library collections and problems with current catalogue products may be causing underutilization of the decentralized libraries in general. The relatively low level of marketing and promotion may also be leading to low awareness and consequent underutilization of certain library components.

- **Inefficiencies** - Where libraries are poorly maintained and staffed, and where low utilization has been noted, staff inefficiencies in locating needed information are inevitable. Operational efficiencies have been achieved throughout, although more potential may exist to reduce duplication in branch record keeping regarding materials acquisitions and budget monitoring.

Delivery

With regard to service delivery, the key evaluation issues relate to responsibility, duplication and gaps in service.

Responsibility

To a large extent, each departmental library is an independent entity with no formal relationship governing quality of resources and services implemented, or the interaction with other libraries. The absence of a formally articulated **program framework** (i.e., mandate, policies, standards) has inevitably led to inconsistencies in library components and in the services delivered.

A reasonable level of coordination exists among the libraries in acquisitions and cataloguing. The delivery of reference services, however, is not as well coordinated, due mainly to a reluctance by

EVALUATION OF LIBRARY SERVICES

Delivery (continued)

decentralized librarians to access the internal network, even though the central library is meeting decentralized requests in a timely way.

Duplication

Except for structural duplication in the regional office libraries which may be reduced through centralization of certain elements of special, curricular and reference collections, the only potential for duplication resides in branch purchases of periodicals. Further investigation of specific collections may be required, but the extent of duplication is not likely to be significant in view of the unique roles and information requirements of each branch.

The departmental libraries do not appear to be duplicating resources and services available through external libraries, which cannot readily provide the service scope and turnaround required by department staff.

Users did not perceive any overlap in the services provided by the various departmental information units, although the potential exists for more involvement of the libraries in delivering executive information services, and in the general planning, development and implementation of departmental information and records systems.

Gaps

Due to the deficiency in collection policies and service standards, and inconsistencies in funds allocated to the various libraries, resources and services are lacking in certain locations. Decentralized users have noted specific gaps in staffing and materials, while central users noted problems with materials.

EVALUATION OF LIBRARY SERVICES

Delivery (continued)

In general terms, the libraries do not promote their capabilities to any significant degree, particularly their unique capability for highly tailored **current awareness** services. As a result, the existing potential for service delivery is not being fully realized.

New Services

With regard to the need for and the potential benefits of new services, the area considered most desirable was for library staff to provide more **extensive value added services**, such as routine scanning and monitoring of publications to notify users of relevant developments in their particular areas. Current capabilities for such high profile, proactive services are not being fully utilized, and are one of the more notable deficiencies of the department's library services in comparison to other special libraries.

Another important service area to be improved is staff **orientation/ inservice**, which would help to increase overall awareness and utilization of current resources. Subject to departmental policies, it would also be beneficial for the libraries to publish their own **newsletter** to aid in overall promotion of existing and emerging capabilities.

With regard to other new service areas which special libraries are beginning to deliver, the department should consider obtaining input from its librarians on matters relating to **records management** and **information systems planning and development** because of their strong user orientation and information retrieval skills. Consideration should also be given to providing access to **research librarians** who would be seconded from the library to work on specific research projects to assist in gathering, summarizing and interpreting information.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the number and variety of concerns disclosed by the user survey and interviews with professional staff, the department's library services have many strengths, and are meeting the expectations of users in many locations. Perhaps the greatest strength of the libraries is their **proximity to users**, and the fact that library staff have been designated in each location to serve the information needs of the users.

The vast majority of departmental staff are better served by the current internal library system than they would be by external libraries because of the local availability of resources and special services tailored to the unique needs of the department; however, the full potential inherent in the current library resource and service capability is not being achieved. The fundamental cause of current weaknesses rests ultimately with the fact that a program framework has never been formally articulated for library services. In the absence of a clear program mandate based on a thorough analysis of professional needs and available delivery alternatives, it has been difficult to develop a coherent library services strategy, with comprehensive policies regarding such matters as:

- funding and resource allocation;
- staff qualifications and functional reporting relationships;
- collection development, maintenance and inventory control;
- service delivery standards;
- centralization/decentralization of resources.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the quality of each of the departmental libraries reflects the perceived **priorities in each location rather than a department-wide vision** for a consistently high quality professional support system, available to all staff regardless of location or functional level.

Symptomatic of the **lack of policy direction** are many of the problems which have been noted in library services in the department, including:

CONCLUSIONS

- differences in expenditures on library resources, and inconsistencies in the quality and quantity of local collections;
- inappropriately high ratio of books to periodicals and other resources;
- weaknesses in the maintenance and management of some library collections;
- lack of agreement on the levels of service to be provided to users outside the department;
- deficiencies in the qualifications of library staff;
- insufficient availability of library staff (i.e., part-time staff, clerical duties);
- incomplete use of centralized acquisitions;
- incomplete cataloguing of departmental resources;
- low internal library network utilization;
- lack of orientation/inservice training.

The ad hoc development of library computer systems also reflects the overall lack of guidance which would have been provided by a clear mandate and policy framework.

These matters are considered **planning and design limitations** of the departmental library services program, and do not necessarily indicate deficiencies in the operation of the libraries themselves. In fact, library staff have, for the most part, done an admirable job in meeting

CONCLUSIONS

local needs and demands, and have demonstrated the desire and dedication to improve service capabilities. There are, however, two notable deficiencies in the delivery of library services which are considered to be within the scope of the libraries to have addressed:

- **Marketing** - There is presently little marketing and promotion of library services, particularly those relating to **value added current awareness services** directed at management levels. These are services which the other provincial education and exemplary special libraries appear to be providing to a greater degree. The libraries have not been successful in promoting the value of certain external databases, and their image has suffered as a result. Work will be required to establish a better and closer working relationship with all levels of management within the department to fully utilize the service capabilities inherent in these databases.

- **Evaluative Statistics** - There has been a relatively low emphasis on gathering operational statistics, particularly by the decentralized libraries. Steps are being taken to address this weakness, although additional work will be required to develop a comprehensive evaluative management information system for the libraries which serves to inform librarians as well as management of the performance of the department's libraries.

GUIDELINES FOR PHASE THREE

The major weakness of the departmental library network remains the absence of a formal mandate and policy framework. This issue has been recognized by both previous and present management personnel, although it has taken some time to commission the study needed to address the future of the library services program. With regard to development of the long-range plan for library services (Phase Three), the department should consider the following matters.

Mission

The new mandate for library services should provide a clear vision for the development of policy and the delivery of services, with one overriding goal: to provide for **equal information access** by all professional staff in the department, regardless of location.

The following principles were established in the June 29, 1982 memo from the Deputy Minister regarding the plan for reorganization of the department.

- Alberta Education is a professional organization, with an emphasis on planning, innovation, experimentation and use of external expertise.

- Professional staff operate in a complex, dynamic and uncertain environment, which must be constantly monitored in order for the organization to respond and adapt.

- The department is operationally complex with a wide variety of activities and services, requiring a structure and support systems which maximize the potential of its staff.

There is unquestionably a valid and essential role for library services in helping to support these organizational principles. All staff should

GUIDELINES FOR PHASE THREE

Mission (continued)

have access to the information resources and services necessary to carry out their responsibilities effectively and efficiently, regardless of their function and location. The mission for library services should reflect this requirement, and should establish the extent to which value added services will be embraced within the operating philosophy of the libraries. The department should be prepared to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure consistently high standards of service in its libraries. Such a goal may well imply additional program costs to upgrade library services in certain locations, although the current strategy for service delivery should be reviewed with a view to identifying cost savings through more streamlined operations.

Policy Development

The long-range plan for library services should establish appropriate library policies, guidelines and procedures in the following areas:

Library Organization

- librarian qualifications, job descriptions, training and performance appraisal
- functional reporting relationships between central and decentralized libraries

Collection Development and Maintenance

- expenditure guidelines for materials
- collection content and purpose
- collection maintenance and inventory control

Library Operations

- acquisitions (library collections and branch materials)
- cataloguing (new purchases and retrospective conversions)
- reference/network activity (all libraries)

GUIDELINES FOR PHASE THREE

Policy Development (continued)

- inservice (librarians and new staff)
- priority of serving external users
- library services marketing

The major obstacles to improving library services are structural in nature, and policy is required to guide program and delivery decisions. The Library Evaluation Committee may wish to establish appropriate subcommittees to work out policy details and implementation tactics once the major strategic issues have been resolved.

The greatest attention should be paid to improving library service to decentralized users, since these individuals are highly dependent on their libraries as a source of job-related information, and suffer the most with respect to inconsistencies in resource and service capabilities in their libraries. In this regard, it would be advisable to review the current policy of allocating discretionary funds to individual consultants for purchase of materials. While a measure of local autonomy should be allowed, this policy has led to some of the inconsistencies in local collections, and hampers proper library collection development and maintenance efforts.

While staffing and resources are critical issues, it is important that the new policies also help to foster improved performance of the internal network through increased interaction between centralized and decentralized library staff. Decentralized library staff who are reluctant to refer user information requests to the network constitute an obstacle to improved service delivery.

Without necessarily compromising the authority of directors over local library decisions, increased central input into collection development policy, service delivery standards, library planning and evaluation, and staff recruitment, training and evaluation should be considered.

GUIDELINES FOR PHASE THREE

Program and Delivery Standards

The libraries should establish specific standards for the performance of each component and the delivery of library services, including:

- fill rates
- turnaround times
- utilization rates

A variety of statistical measures for public and special libraries has been developed in the above general categories which help to provide a yardstick for the ongoing evaluation of program performance. Such standards should be developed for all departmental libraries, and should be monitored on an ongoing basis as part of the comprehensive management information system being developed by the central library.

A mechanism is required to foster greater teamwork and joint responsibility between central staff and decentralized management for the delivery of library services. It may be beneficial for a form of "charter" to be drawn up between each decentralized director and the central library which establishes the operating philosophy and goals relating to library service delivery, and the respective responsibilities of central and decentralized staff in providing user services.

The central library would then be responsible for monitoring the performance of all libraries, and for making recommendations and assisting directors in the implementation of improvements as required.

Planning and Evaluation Cycle

The long-range plan for library services should establish the cycle for periodic program planning and evaluation, including the frequency and process for:

GUIDELINES FOR PHASE THREE

Planning and Evaluation Cycle (continued)

- needs assessment
- program planning
- program evaluation
- service delivery evaluation

Not all such activities need be performed on the same cycle. A frequent problem with many programs, including the department's library services, has been the absence of routine, formal planning and evaluation exercises. Performed on a regular basis, such activities should prove no more time-consuming than if performed at longer intervals, and should help ensure that the library program adapts dynamically to the needs of the department.

Departmental Integration

The long-range plan and optimal technological configuration for library services should be based on the overall departmental goals and strategies for information services presently under review.

The scope of the library services program is proving an increasingly difficult concept to define, particularly as automation enhances the capability of the libraries to deliver information services. The traditional boundaries of responsibility over internal versus external information are blurring, as are the rules that govern the implementation of computerized information systems within the organization. The plan for information systems should stress increased integration of the various departmental information services, and a more prominent role for the libraries in the planning process.

GUIDELINES FOR PHASE THREE

Program Delivery Options

The department should consider, on a location by location basis, the increased centralization of library resources and services.

Notwithstanding the present departmental philosophy regarding decentralization, sufficient benefits must be demonstrated to justify the costs of maintaining a library in each location. Current practice indicates that the library is not a particularly high priority in some locations, with the result that only a token effort is made towards maintaining the local collections and providing reference and current awareness services. It would be understandably difficult for many decentralized directors to justify the costs of a fully self-sufficient local library; however, some measures are necessary to ensure professional and managerial staff have equal access to consistently high quality library services at each location.

There are three major service delivery alternatives which the department should consider in developing its long-range plan for library services; these represent a complete spectrum of options, from highly decentralized to highly centralized service delivery.

Option 1 - Maintenance of Decentralized Libraries

This option would essentially maintain the status quo, with centralization of acquisitions/cataloguing and other services (current awareness, inservice, etc.) at the discretion of the individual branch; however, library policies and service delivery standards would be implemented to **strengthen local staff and resource capabilities** and to **improve the functioning of the library network.** This option would imply additional costs, but would maximize the service capability of the departmental library system.

GUIDELINES FOR PHASE THREE

Program Delivery Options (continued)

Option 2 - Selective Centralization of Library Components

Where user numbers in certain locations do not warrant the allocation of a full-time professional librarian and associated resources, there may well be both cost savings and service improvements by filling the needs of decentralized users from one or more central locations. This option assumes that a professional librarian located centrally but dedicated to serving the needs of a small group of decentralized users, could provide equally good or better service than a local clerk with conflicting duties and inadequate training and resources.

Depending on local demands, the following components might be candidates for centralization:

Services

- in-depth reference/information retrieval
- current awareness
- orientation/inservice

Collections

- unauthorized classroom materials
- selection aids
- computer courseware
- special education resources
- Alberta Education documents

On-site clerical or technical staff in decentralized libraries would be used mainly for maintenance of local collections, and for providing limited quick reference services. Local collections might consist only of professional resources, authorized curricular resources, and appropriate catalogues. The changes in regional office consultant

GUIDELINES FOR PHASE THREE

Program Delivery Options (continued)

responsibilities will result in lower dependence on curricular resources, although authorized curricula will remain important. Greater emphasis, however, would be placed on establishing sound professional collections (particularly journals) to support the emerging professional needs of staff. The trend away from expensive book materials towards less costly periodicals suggests that strong local professional collections could be maintained at an acceptable cost, particularly if portions of the specialized and curricular collections could be centralized.

Option 3 - Selective Centralization of Library Facilities

There may be justification for closing libraries at certain locations, delivering all library services and housing the formal library collections in another location. Local professional staff would be allocated limited funds to acquire "personal book collections" to be kept on permanent loan in their own offices, and would also subscribe directly to journals of interest. All acquisitions, however, would be centralized in order to screen for potential duplication and to catalogue the resources if required.

Within this option, the following alternatives might be considered.

- **Minimal Consolidation** - Close the Lethbridge, Red Deer and Grande Prairie Regional Office libraries, and serve Grande Prairie staff from the Edmonton Regional Office library, and Lethbridge and Red Deer staff from the Calgary Regional Office library. Since staff in smaller regional offices might feel somewhat isolated without a local librarian, special measures would be required to ensure frequent contact between these professionals and their

GUIDELINES FOR PHASE THREE

Program Delivery Options (continued)

"designated central librarian" to build up the credibility necessary for user support of the new delivery system.

- **Moderate Consolidation** - In addition to the above, close the Edmonton Regional Office library, and serve Grande Prairie and Edmonton staff from the central library. The proximity of the Edmonton Regional Office to the Devonian Building (central library) suggests the possibility that current duplication of resources and services could be reduced, although the large number of professional staff in the Edmonton Regional Office may justify some local service capability.

- **Maximum Consolidation** - Close all regional office libraries, and maintain only the central library and the two provincial school libraries. This alternative would only be feasible if extremely strong communication and delivery channels were implemented to ensure close and frequent contact with users and prompt turnaround of information.

Little justification can be seen for closing the Alberta School for the Deaf library under its current operating mode; however, the implementation of Response Centres will dramatically change the research and professional information needs of staff, some or all of which might be delivered centrally. The proximity of the Alberta Correspondence School to Edmonton may generate opportunities for centralization of certain library components (e.g., special collections), although it is difficult to see how teachers' curricular needs could be met without a local library.

Any decision to eliminate decentralized libraries would presume a mandate which did not encompass the requirement to serve external

GUIDELINES FOR PHASE THREE

Program Delivery Options (continued)

users (e.g., school teachers, students, etc.). It is envisaged that centralization, if implemented, would not be applied universally; the actual degree of centralization, and the respective roles of central and decentralized library staff, would be worked out cooperatively on a location-by-location basis. The guiding principle should be for greater centralized involvement and support in the smaller organizational settings where the number of users may not justify a fully self-sufficient local library.

Epilogue

The findings of this study indicate that there is considerable room for improving departmental library services without dramatically increasing costs. The key to preparation of the long-range plan for library services will be establishing a vision for the scope of library services that will be made available to departmental staff in executing their responsibilities. Exemplary organizations are exemplary in all endeavours, and pay special attention to the internal support systems provided to their professional and managerial staff. The potential for library services as an essential support service should not be underestimated.